

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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THE YEAR IN REVIEW March 1 - May 14, 1989

The Cleveland Museum of Art's annual Year in Review exhibition is considered the most important show in the Museum's schedule. The 1988 Year in Review, which will run from March 1 through May 14, 1989, brings together for the first time more than 230 works of art purchased by or given to the Museum during the past year.

In his introduction to the Museum's February 1989 Bulletin, which serves as the catalogue for this exhibition, Museum director Evan H. Turner reflects on the unique character of The Cleveland Museum of Art's holdings, with their "breadth and balance unusual in American public collections." Although the activities of private collectors have pushed the prices of certain works, particularly paintings, to new heights, the Museum strives to maintain the high standards of its past and to broaden and strengthen its collections. Again this year, he points out, "virtually every section of the Museum has acquired noteworthy objects."

Among the most important acquisitions of 1988 is an oil on panel painting of The Repentant Magdalen by Simon Vouet (1590-1649), who was, after Nicolas Poussin, the most influential French painter of the 17th century. Vouet introduced the Italian Baroque style to France, and this beautifully executed work, probably painted soon after 1627 when he returned to France following a fourteen-year sojourn in Italy, clearly reflects the influence of Caravaggio and the classical Baroque painters, particularly Guido Reni. Vouet portrays the Magdalen, contemplating a vision of the cross, as a woman of great physical beauty and deep spirituality.

The Museum continues to enlarge its representation of 19th-century European painting, last year with a charming portrait of a young Viennese noblewoman, Crescentia Countess Zichy (later Countess Széchényi), painted in 1828 by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller (1793-1865), the outstanding Austrian painter in the Biedermeier style. This style, fashionable in Austria and Germany between the end of the Napoleonic period (1815) and the Revolution of 1848, reflected a conservative society's taste for the pleasures of bourgeois domesticity and the beauties of nature. The unpretentious air of the Countess, posed with her parrot and a camellia in an outdoor mountain setting, and the detailed rendering of her jewelry and cashmere shawl, convey the essence of the Biedermeier style. This painting joins a small but distinguished assemblage of works by European Biedermeier painters, which includes a Viennese landscape by Waldmüller acquired in 1983.

Strengthening the Museum's holdings in early 20th-century British painting is a self-portrait by Sir William Orpen (1878-1931), eagerly sought portraitist of England's smart set. Painted in 1912, the portrait demonstrates Orpen's interest in the collage technique which Picasso and Braque were experimenting with in France at the same time. While painting his reflection in a gilt-framed mirror, Orpen affixed train tickets and personal papers to the painting in such a way that these real objects appear to be tucked into the painted mirror frame.

Added to the growing contemporary collection was a recent and major work, Vaulting, by critically acclaimed American painter Susan Rothenberg (b. 1945). The centrally placed figure in the 7 x 11-foot painting is pole vaulting in repeated images, as in successive film frames, creating a feeling of motion. Rothenberg's energetic, varied brushwork, which animates all areas of the composition, recalls works by Claude Monet, Alberto Giacometti, and Jackson Pollock.

The Museum's exceptionally fine collection of 18th-century French art did not include, until last year, a work by the famous portrait sculptor Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741-1828). In 1988 the Museum acquired one of Houdon's finest works, a terra-cotta bust of the German composer Christopher Willibald von Gluck, modeled entirely by hand around 1774. In what is perhaps his most original conception, Houdon solved the problem of creating a realistic portrait of Gluck, whose face had been ravaged by smallpox, without detracting from the genius and greatness of the man. He did this by portraying his subject in a rough woolen coat whose texture makes the composer's pockmarked face look smoother by comparison and leads the viewer to overlook his disfigured complexion and focus instead on his expressive features.

Representing a later period in French art is a child's throne, made in 1822 for the two-year-old Henri, Duc de Bordeaux, who reigned as King of France for sixteen days in 1830 until his cousin Louis-Philippe supplanted him. The chair is made of elaborately carved and gilded wood, upholstered in leather, and decorated with symbols of France, and is signed by Pierre-Marie Balny le Jeune, a well-known Parisian furniture maker.

While searching for new acquisitions, curators discovered objects of extraordinary historical as well as aesthetic importance. Three beautifully crafted silver-gilt vessels--a vase, beaker, and rhyton, or drinking cup--are similar in design and motif to ancient Persian (Sasanian) and Chinese silver. The inscription on the beaker is probably the earliest known example of Tibetan script; it identifies the vessels as the personal effects of the Chinese wife of the 7th-century Tibetan ruler, Songsten Gampo. Although Tibetan history has been recorded since the 7th century, until now no art objects from that early period were known to exist. These vessels epitomize the exchange of stylistic motifs that characterize goods created for trade along the silk route between China and the West.

Another major discovery were two rare and brilliantly colored fragments of silk and gold tapestry that for centuries had been preserved in Tibetan monasteries. One tapestry, woven in the 10th century, incorporates animals motifs that have their origins in Persia and China; the other, ornamented with dragons of northern Chinese (Liao) design, dates from around 1100. These opulent fabrics are among the few surviving examples of a silk tapestry industry that flourished in Central Asia in an area known today as Chinese Turkestan.

In 1988 the Museum purchased its first examples of European Bronze Age metalwork, a group of boldly designed bronze objects made about 1500 B.C. by a people who inhabited the Carpathian Mountains in Hungary. This group of handsome objects consists of a solid-cast battle ax engraved with flame-like designs, two armlets, and a torque or neck ring, the latter works skillfully forged into elegant spiral shapes by repeated heating and hammering.

The achievements of the ancient Greeks are well represented in this exhibition. A terra-cotta perfume bottle in the form of a heron, with graceful curving neck and folded wings, its feathers defined by delicately painted and incised lines, is the finest known example of a type of animal-shaped vase that was popular in the eastern Mediterranean between 580 and 550 B.C. The Museum's new acquisition is attributed to one of the most imaginative makers of these bottles, a potter who worked in the Greek city of Miletus on the west coast of Turkey.

Dating to about 340 B.C. is a magnificent example of the enormous, lavishly decorated earthenware vessels made as funerary offerings in the Greek provinces of South Italy. Painted on this krater are scenes from Greek mythology ascribed to the greatest of all South Italian painters of this period, known to art historians as the Darius painter.

A marble torso of Aphrodite, dating to the 2nd-1st century B.C., was probably carved by a Greek sculptor in South Italy, where it was found early in this century. Although many classical marbles have lost their original finishes because of overzealous cleaning, this one maintains its soft, sensuous surface.

Of the many illustrated manuscripts of the Persian national epic, the Shāhnāmeh or Book of Kings, written by the Persian poet Firdawsi in 1010 A.D., one of the greatest and most sumptuous is the manuscript begun in 1522 for the Safavid Prince Tahmasp, which contains 258 colorful miniature paintings, now dispersed in several collections. Last year the Museum was able to purchase one of the most beautiful and imaginative plates from this masterpiece, the bloody encounter between the hero Rustam and the fierce demon chief, White Div. The fantastic landscape, which overflows the margins of the painting, its jewel-like colors and rich detail, demonstrate why this manuscript is so widely admired.

The Asian collections were enriched with a wide range of works in 1988. Outstanding accessions to the growing collection of Japanese painting include two rare examples of the expressive ink paintings which were such an important part of Zen Buddhist culture during Japan's Muromachi period (1392-1573). One is a hanging scroll depicting frenzied worker ants, struggling to move a huge pumpkin, urged on by leader ants and encouraged by musician ants. This animated work, and the commentary inscribed on it, are attributed to Bokusai Shōtō, a 15th-century Zen monk painter and calligrapher. The work, which has no counterpart in Western collections, represents a long-standing tradition in Japanese painting of using animals and insects to satirize human foibles.

An especially fine hanging scroll of the late 15th century depicts the benevolent god Hotei, a favorite subject of Zen artists. It was painted by an amateur monk painter who used a subtle range of ink tones and brushstrokes to model the smiling,

rotund figure of the god. The painting's lengthy inscription by a famous 15th-century Zen priest, Jonan Etetsu, contributes to the work's importance.

The developing Korean collection acquired a remarkably preserved 8th-century gilt bronze image of a standing Buddha, about ten inches high. Icons of this type were often carried by Buddhist monks as they traveled throughout Korea preaching the doctrines of their faith. Reminiscent of Chinese Tang dynasty Buddhas, this image shows how the artistic traditions of China were brought to Korea with the Buddhist religion.

Augmenting the collection of early Chinese ceramics is a large, ornately decorated green-glazed stoneware jar, a well-preserved example of a funerary vessel made in the Western Jin Dynasty (c. 300 A.D.), possibly as a resting place for the soul. The lid of the jar, shaped like a multi-storied pavilion, is surrounded by kneeling musicians; like the freestanding terra cotta figures of musicians that have been found in Chinese tombs, they were intended to entertain the spirit in the afterlife.

The prints and drawings collection, an especially distinguished part of the Museum's holdings, added notable works by Dutch and Italian old masters and contemporary American artists. An exceptionally beautiful ink drawing of the Madonna and Child with Angels by the 16th-century Milanese artist Aurelio Luini shows the influence of Leonardo da Vinci, who was the teacher of Luini's father, Bernardino. The Print Club of Cleveland, which since its founding in 1919 has given generously to the collection, last year gave a fine impression of Rembrandt's 1641 etching of Christ Crucified Between the Two Thieves. Another major acquisition is Mary Cassatt's soft ground etching and aquatint portrait of her mother, Knitting in the Library, executed around 1881. This rare impression, one of the first examples of the American artist's printmaking endeavors, is a welcome addition because the Museum owns the preparatory drawing for this print, given in 1941. The Museum also acquired an

elegant graphite drawing entitled Vines and Brambles, its first work by Robert Smithson (1938-1973), an American artist best known for his earthworks.

Ninety-five photographs were acquired last year, including a number of superb mid- and late-19th-century works by British, American, and French photographers. Heading the list of 20th-century photographs is an imaginative cloud study by Alfred Stieglitz from a series exploring the changing relationships of cloud and light, which he called Equivalents. Also noteworthy are twenty prints by Paul Strand, from a portfolio of photographs taken around the world, four of W. Eugene Smith's best known images, and a view through a rain-streaked window by Josef Sudek, the Czech photographer whose works were exhibited at the Museum last December and January.

Gallery talks in the exhibition will be given during the opening week of the show, on Wednesday, March 1, and Sunday, March 5, at 1:30 pm, and during the closing week, on Wednesday, May 10, and Sunday, May 14, at 1:30 pm.

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